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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 000069

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV EI

SUBJECT: TIT FOR TAT IN DUBLIN: MINISTER SARGENT RESIGNS

REF: DUBLIN 61

Classified By: PEO Chief Dwight Nystrom. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

**¶1.** (C) Summary: On February 23, former Minister for Food and Horticulture Trevor Sargent (Green Party -- GP) resigned after a letter he wrote in 2008 was leaked to the press. Sargent admitted that the letter, written to Garda (Irish police) on behalf of a constituent, "could be considered unlawful." The source of the leak is unknown but opposition politicians have accused Fianna Fail (FF) and, more specifically, Justice Minister Dermot Ahern of involvement. The episode is rumored to be retribution for GP involvement in the resignation of former FF Defence Minister Willie O'Dea (reftel). We expect the coalition government to survive. However, in the run-up to its annual convention in late March, the GP leadership may come under increasing pressure to leave government. End Summary.

The Letter

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**¶2.** (U) In June 2008 GP member and former Minister for Food and Horticulture Trevor Sargent was asked to intervene in a criminal case by a constituent, Dominic McGowan. McGowan told Sargent that the case was progressing slowly and that Garda had not interviewed key witnesses. Sargent wrote a letter to the investigating Garda officers. On February 23, the letter was published in a local newspaper and within five hours Sargent resigned his position as Minister. In his brief statement to the Dail (the Irish parliament), Sargent admitted that, though writing this letter was not a criminal offense, it can be considered unlawful under Section 6 of the Prosecutions of Offences Act of 1974.

Who Can It Be Now?

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**¶3.** (U) The key unknown is the question of who leaked the letter to the press. While there is no smoking gun, both main opposition parties -- Labour and Fine Gael -- blame Sargent's demise on FF and hinted that this was retribution for the Green's role in last week's O'Dea resignation. Labour leader Eamon Gilmore and Fine Gael's Justice spokesman, Charlie Flanagan, both insinuated that Justice Minister Dermot Ahern (FF), who has oversight over Garda, was involved in the leak.

**¶4.** (U) GP leader John Gormley kept his options open on the question of whether his FF coalition partners were involved. He said, "It isn't always best to make comments when you're in such an emotional state, and that's why we want to refrain from speculation at this stage." According to press reports, Gormley and his GP Dail colleagues maintained a unified front yesterday, walking out of the Dail with Sargent after he had delivered his resignation speech.

Comment: Should We Stay or Should We Go?

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15. (C) Comment: This episode will undoubtedly strain the relationship between Fianna Fail and the Greens; however, we do not think the coalition will come apart over this issue. That said, in the run-up to its national convention on March 27, the GP leadership may face increasing pressure to vote its conscience and pull out of the coalition and by doing so bring down the government. The main constraint on taking this path -- and one that the GP leadership will make clear to the party faithful -- is that the Greens would be decimated in a general election. At this point, the trappings of power look likely to outweigh the tug of conscience. End Comment.

FAUCHER